



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**VITAL LIVING NETWORK TESTIMONY
HOUSING POLICY
December 1, 2011**

Good evening, my name is Leslie Marks, I am co-chair of the Montgomery County Vital Living Network ("VLN"). The Montgomery County Vital Living Network initiates, advocates for and supports opportunities that enhance and empower the County's 50+ population.

The Vital Living Network supports a housing policy that provides for a variety of affordable housing options for older adults. We believe that older adults in Montgomery County should have choices that suit their particular lifestyle priorities. In this regard, we support:

- seniors aging in place in their community through the village movement;
- expedited plan approval that includes reduced development fees for affordable housing for older adults;
- accessory apartments as an expedited approval process removing this use from the special exception process;
- rental assistance for low-income seniors to help them maintain and stay in their homes;
- VisitAble and Livable homes for frail seniors and for people with disabilities; and,
- "purpose built" affordable senior housing in the high density master planned communities of White Flint, Wheaton, the Purple Line, Silver Spring and Takoma Park.

There are an increasing number of older adults living in Montgomery County. The 2010 census found that:

- 12.3% of Montgomery County's population is 65 or older;

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- older adults are projected to be 14.7% of the population in 2020 and almost 20% of the total population by 2030.
- the number of older adults that live below the poverty line in Montgomery County is an alarming 1 in 6.
- the waiting lists for existing affordable “purpose built” senior housing are long and don’t meet the existing demand. As an example, there are approximately 3,000 older adults waiting for affordable housing through the Housing Opportunities Commission. Clearly Montgomery County is not meeting the affordable housing needs of older adults.

Montgomery County has a history of affordable housing through its MPDU program, a program that disperses MPDU recipients throughout the community. It is a fact that seniors who are independent but frail older adults, can live alone and benefit from enriched and supportive programming. However, they need housing that congregates a population mass to make the delivery of desired services such as health and wellness programs, long term learning opportunities, socialization programs, and transportation to be both effective and efficient.

To satisfy the needs of an aging population in Montgomery County, a different approach to housing policy is needed -- one that promotes and facilitates housing options that are safe and supports an enriched and active lifestyle. The Vital Living Network believes that the proposals made by the Department of Housing and Community Affairs titled, “Possible New Issues/Solutions to Address in the 2011 Housing Policy” has identified the changing housing needs in Montgomery County, particularly for seniors and has recommended solutions for change.

The following are the Vital Living Network’s position on the “Possible New Issues/Solutions to Address in the 2011 Housing Policy.”

1. We strongly support the proposal for no net loss of regulated affordable housing units. The current affordable housing stock provides a base line of housing for those of low and moderate income. Preserving that stock with the goal of increasing it to meet increasing needs is essential to support the County’s changing demographics. Increasing the

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affordable housing stock can be achieved through expedited plan approval, zoning that promotes housing choice, promoting mixed use development that includes affordable housing, providing lower permit fees and other financial incentives, and including purpose built senior housing.

2. The use of County land for affordable housing with an expedited review process for affordable housing is a policy the VLN endorses. The VLN prefers to see the use of scarce financial resources on the actual construction of affordable housing than on time consuming review processes. Adopting expedited review process by both the Park and Planning Commission and the County plan reviewers will clearly benefit the affordable housing cause.
3. The Vital Living Network supports actions to encourage the building of VisitAble and Accessible housing. One method to encourage the construction of VisitAble and Accessible housing is to promote an expedited review process, as a tool to encourage such housing. Limiting permit fees and other development taxes on the development of accessible and VisitAble housing is another tool to encourage the construction of such housing.
4. The VLN supports accessory apartments and in doing so supports a review process that encourages this housing option. Accessory apartments are one important source of affordable housing for older adults. Therefore, the process of approval should be streamlined so as not to force those seeking accessory apartments to incur unnecessary costs and expenditure of time and perhaps eliminating this option altogether. Research performed by AARP and Met Life provides examples of communities supporting the development of accessory apartments by streamlining the approval process and providing specific development requirements to insure neighborhood compatibility.

As the Master Plan process continues to progress in the older down County areas, the Vital Living Network urges a policy that supports the development of housing for seniors as well as for young people and families. The housing needs of seniors in Montgomery County are different from family housing needs or those needs of young singles and should be considered as carefully as the housing needs of the rest of our diverse

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population. It benefits the entire community to keep older adults in Montgomery County. They are tax payers and community volunteers; they support local businesses; and, they have long supported to the County's growth. One way to keep older adults in Montgomery County is to make their needs part of the County conversation. Housing needs and options are a big part of that conversation.

In summary, The Vital Living Network supports the Department of Housing and Community Affairs approach to developing innovative and some non-traditional solutions to solve existing housing needs within Montgomery County.

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